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## Besluiten in uitvoering. Theorieën over beleidsuitvoering modelmatig getoetst op sociale vernieuwing in drie gemeenten

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*This book describes a positive model of the implementation of policy decisions. The model combines the salience of implementation agencies for policy decisions with the extent to which these agencies are effectively controlled, in order to predict agency deviations from policy decisions. Special attention is paid to the effects of (a lack of) political consensus on the amount of agency deviations. Political consensus does not generally enhance compliance--as is often asserted. This is shown in a theoretical analysis and by an application of the model on 134 policy performances in three Dutch municipalities.*

### **Theoretical background**

Diverging problem perceptions and conflicting policy preferences sometimes make the implementation of policy decisions a highly political affair. A lack of consensus among decision makers, and between decision makers and implementation agencies, is thought to interfere with a proper course of the implementation process. The relation between politicians and agencies is sometimes described as the "compliance problem" (Noll & Weingast, 1991). This concerns the question of the conditions under which implementation agencies deviate from policy decisions and the conditions under which they do not. In terms of policy prescription we may ask how the latter conditions can be successfully realized.

It is often recommended that actors strive for consensus on the propositions of the policy before implementation takes place. This consensus between decision makers and implementation agencies is thought to reduce the incentive of agencies to deviate from the decided outcomes of the formulated policy. Sometimes such a recommendation is not feasible, for example when policy perceptions are fundamentally different and the proposed interventions are highly contested. In those cases, political control of implementation agencies would presumably reduce the problems of agency compliance, although it is theoretically unclear how a small number of politicians could actually control the behavior of a multitude of implementation agencies.

The research in the present book is based on the proposition that implementation agencies have policy perceptions and preferences of their own. Their perceptions are based on their past experience and future expectations regarding policy feasibility. Implementation agencies often know the consequences of their policy interventions better than politicians. This knowledge may give rise to a policy perception which differs from the policy perception of politicians. Another important assumption in the present study is

that implementation agencies strive to realize their own policy positions. This leads to the following research questions:

- I. Under what conditions does a lack of consensus *between decision makers and implementation agencies* on the most preferred outcome of policy decisions lead to policy deviations by implementation agencies?
- II. Under what conditions does a lack of consensus *among decision makers* on the most preferred outcome of policy decisions lead to policy deviations by implementation agencies?

### Positive model of policy implementation

The research questions are approached through the construction of a simple, positive model of policy implementation, which incorporates the political control of agencies. This is in contrast with much of the literature, which frequently emphasizes the highly complex nature of implementation, and in which verbal theories are the norm. For the sake of simplicity, in the present study implementation is regarded as the execution of a policy decision via individual agencies rather than through complex interorganizational patterns. The model assumes one-dimensional policy scales and single peaked preference functions of politicians and agencies. Agencies are assumed to rationally optimize the combination of the reputational consequences of deviating from the official policy outcome and preferential consequences of moving away from the most preferred outcome. Agencies implement the policy alternative which minimizes their net loss.

The behavior of agencies therefore falls between two extremes: *full compliance* with the official policy outcome, and *full deviation* from the policy in the direction of the agency's most preferred outcome. The compliance problem arises when there is a conflict of interest between implementation agencies and politicians. An agency could be expected to rationally deviate when its own policy preferences are in conflict with the official policy goals. It is hypothesized that the actual deviating behavior of implementation agencies varies in accordance with three factors affecting the political control of agencies: (a) the opportunity space for individual agencies, resulting from monitoring, sanctioning and their salience for policy decisions; (b) the reputational sensitivity of agencies, resulting from procedural arrangements; and (c) the degree of consensus among politicians.

### Data

The hypotheses are tested with reference to the implementation of three policy



programs in the domain of social renewal in three Dutch municipalities. This policy domain was selected because more discretion of agencies was expected than in, for example, an infrastructural policy domain. The policy is less constrained by Dutch national regulations. The policy programs consisted of a number of local projects. The duration of these projects was relatively short, so model predictions could be checked in relatively short order.

To gather the relevant data, a first step was to scrutinize all relevant policy documents. These documents included: (a) the policy proposals of the administration; (b) the final document containing the statutory principles and motivation of the public policy; (c) minutes concerning the discussion of the policy proposals and the final document by the city council (and the special committees on social affairs); (d) internal documents and memos within the administration; (e) records of discussion meetings with stakeholders and target groups. From this content analysis resulted a preliminary inventory of policy decisions, alternative courses of action and actors involved. The second step was to check and detail the gathered information by unstructured interviews of a small number of participants who play a central role during decision making and implementation. This qualitative data collection process provided a birds eye view of the policy domain: actors, decisions, alternative outcomes and policy preferences were unveiled, prompting a number of tentative interpretations.

The next stage of data-collection was to transform the qualitative interpretations into quantitative judgements. For this purpose, two "policy domain specialists" were selected (cf. Bueno de Mesquita, Newman & Rabushka, 1985). Using specialists to obtain the quantitative data has some advantages over interviewing all participants separately. Policy making often is a black box, which participants open only with reluctance. The quantitative questionnaire inhibits forthright judgments of policy preferences and effective control. The decided outcome was measured by a close examination of the text of the policy document. The officially authorized policy program and its associated motivation were interpreted as alternative outcome(s) of the relevant policy decision(s). These alternatives were translated into a scale value on each policy decision: the observed decided outcome. The agency's policy performances were assessed by two means: a careful inspection of official evaluation reports, and interviews with the policy domain specialists and participants. The actions of all implementation agencies were listed, described and interpreted as alternative outcome of the policy decisions. This alternative outcome was translated into a policy scale value. The difference between the scale values of the observed decided outcome and the policy as implemented is the observed amount of deviation.

## Results

### *Effects of monitoring, sanctioning and agency salience*

The traditional solution to the compliance problem is contracting, monitoring and sanctioning. However, monitoring implementation agencies is extremely difficult to realize due to an asymmetric distribution of information. Moreover, monitoring is costly because there tends to be a multitude of agencies and only a limited number of monitoring institutions, such as legislative committees, the judiciary, the civil service hierarchy and/or courts of audit. Even when implementation agencies are monitored and can be sanctioned, it may still be worthwhile for them to deviate from certain policy decisions. This could occur when agencies have very strong policy preferences. The strong preferences can – for example – be related to what the agency considers feasible, or to its close relations with certain constituencies. In other words, even while being closely monitored it can be worthwhile for an agency to deviate when the policy decision strongly affects the ability to realize its goals. The extent to which a policy decision is related to the main individual goals of an actor is the *salience* of that actor with respect to the policy decision. Implementation theories and models generally draw little attention to salience when modeling agency behavior. This is an obvious shortcoming because there is no good reason why salience should play no role in the stage of implementation. Even when the implementation agency is fully sensitive to monitoring and sanctioning, the agency may be better off by deviating when its salience is large enough. The direct policy/goal-attainment benefits of deviation compensate for their reputational consequences.

The empirical test provides grounds to suppose that salience in interaction with effective control is a crucial variable in policy implementation. The results suggest that even under conditions of extreme monitoring, agencies will be better off when they deviate than when they comply, if the salience is large enough. Neither full compliance nor full drift describe agency behavior correctly.

### *Effects of administrative procedures*

The reputation sensitivity of implementation agencies is a condition which affects all agencies. When there are no or only weak procedural arrangements, the reputation is not so important to agencies. Fixed procedures and strong involvement of politicians will provide more feedback on performance. Consequently, all agencies will deviate less. When a policy program has a low priority for politicians more deviations occur.

### *Effects of dissent among politicians*

It seems reasonable that the political control of agencies could also be



strongly hampered by dissent among politicians. These effects of a lack of political consensus can be explained by the tolerance of elected officials for agency deviations. The effect of political consensus on agency behavior may very well be contingent on other characteristics of the implementation agencies. The model attempts to specify such conditions. The model developed in this book shows that an implementation agency will deviate *in any case*, if its salience for the policy decision is very large relative to the agency's control sensitivity. In other words; the deviation of an agency need not be due to a lack of political consensus, but rather to the initial disposition of the agency to deviate. However, contrary to these theoretical expectations, the empirical data show no effect of political consensus at all. This result arises in all three municipalities and for all different types of issues. The absence of an effect of political consensus is consistent with the few empirical studies available on this subject.

### Forecasting policy outputs

This book has presented a model to explain and predict the deviating behavior of implementation agencies. The prediction models performed fairly well: about 70 percent of the policy performances were predicted correctly. These results need to be put in proper perspective. An essential theoretical point is that the model is a positive model of implementation. The theoretical argument is based upon rather strong propositions and simplifying assumptions. Reality is much more complex. The applicability of the implementation model therefore is confined to those issues which can be properly translated into a set of one-dimensional policy decisions. Experience with models of collective decision making give reason for optimism on this point (cf. Bueno de Mesquita, Newman & Rabushka, 1985; Laumann & Knoke, 1987; Stokman & Van den Bos, 1992). Another limitation of the model is its theoretical confinement to individual agency execution rather than to implementation in a highly complex interorganizational context. In-depth empirical research on policy implementation often shows considerable interdependence among agencies (cf. Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989).

The empirical application does not permit a full generalization of results. One limitation of the empirical application is also its strength: the use of policy domain specialists. These specialists judge relevant variables independently of the subjective perceptions of participating actors. In that way, their judgments are more impartial. Another limitation of the empirical application is the fact that the model is only tested on one policy domain in three municipalities. Additional empirical applications are indispensable to further extend the argument in this book.